

# *Mindfulness as a Practice of Professional Life: A Reflective Learning Journey with Second Year Teachers*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper summarizes the journey of my doctoral dissertation which was undertaken with nine second year teachers who wished to study the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning. The research participants engaged in four life writing exercises around the topic of Mindfulness and Self, Mindfulness and the Learning Sciences, Mindfulness and Storytelling and Mindfulness in Systems understanding. Through the writing process and the braiding of the individual stories powerful themes emerged. These themes were then organized to create a potential model for teacher education, based on the four quadrants of the Integral Model (Wilber, 2000, 2006) focusing on incorporating mindfulness into personal and professional praxis.

**Keywords:** life writing, professional development, narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry, mindfulness, reflective practitioner

**RESUMÉ:** En deux mots, c'est le parcours de la thèse doctorale que j'ai menée avec neuf professeurs d'école de deuxième année qui souhaitaient étudier le rôle de l'esprit dans les programmes d'études et dans l'apprentissage. Rayonnant autour de l'esprit et du soi, l'esprit et des sciences d'apprentissage, l'esprit et de la narration et l'esprit dans la compréhension, les participants se sont lancés dans quatre exercices d'écriture sur des aspects de la vie. Des thèmes puissants se sont alors dégagés des écrits et du mélange des histoires d'individus et ont été organisés afin de créer un concept possible pour les enseignants d'écoles. Ces thèmes reposent sur les quatre quadrants du Concept central de Wilber (2000)2006) et sont axés sur l'intégration de l'esprit dans la pratique personnelle et professionnelle.

**Mots-clés:** les écrits de la vie, l'évolution professionnelle, la recherche narrative, la recherche poétique, l'esprit, le praticien réfléchi

### *Background of the Journey*

Through my personal and professional experience as an educator I have witnessed the emergence of a school system that is rapidly becoming more disconnected and fragmented. I am one of the many teachers working in complex conditions and settings searching for understanding around diverse issues in curriculum and teaching while seeking a more holistic and authentic learning experience. I have come to recognize that education is an integral practice (Wilber, 2000, 2006) which cannot be encompassed by simply mastering teaching techniques. As a system instructional leader, I realized the vast complexities of our current knowledge society and the significant need to connect the pieces of our educational landscape into a vibrant holistic horizon. This research sought connection and authenticity.

In the past, significant learning moments and theories have defined pedagogical practice, however, current brain research (Czikszentmihalyi, 1993; Damasio, 2010; Davidson et al, 2012; Doidge, 2007; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007) and a move towards well-being (Jardine, 2012; Jones, 2009; Ross, 2011; Seidel, 2006; Siegal, 2010) is inviting educators to pause and reflect on the self, on the process, and on the connection to the whole. Reflection requires mindfulness. Alberta Education is evolving towards in a new vision, as articulated in *Inspiring Action on Education* (Alberta Education, 2010), which focuses on inspiring engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial citizens. These citizens will need to be “learning the landscape”, which requires, “a network of connections that link one’s present location to the larger space” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p. 139). However, in contrast to this system optimistic in education, teachers are feeling increasingly fragmented and suffering high burn out because of the intensifying demands of the profession (Jardine, 2012; Jardine, Clifford and Friesen, 2006; McKinnon, 2009; Smith, 1999). These pressures have resulted in an erosion of the wellness of both teachers and students. Many teachers are exhausted and unable to see what could be possible, as “they and their students are already overburdened and don’t need something added to the mix of expectations. They are exhausted, worn out, caught in what is experienced as an ever-acceleration rush of one thing after the other” (Jardine, 2012, p. 9). There is a need to create time and spaces for reflection and contemplation, to create what Jardine (2012) refers to as a “pedagogy left in peace” (p. 1). There is a need for mindfulness if we are to encourage authentic learning. This research sought to give voice to the experiences of 9 second year teachers, who desired to explore mindfulness and how it may

be incorporated into their curriculum “as lived experience” (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 159). Through our collective journey, shared through the words of our stories, we searched for mindful space where we could all learn, breathe and grow.

### *How Mindfulness Was Defined*

The definition of mindfulness guiding this journey was based on the work of David Smith and his connection of traditional mindful philosophies to the teaching practice. Smith (1999) considers the Sanskrit word *upaya* with regards to teaching praxis:

In Sanskrit, there is a word *upaya*, used precisely to describe the teaching style of an Awakened One. Literally it refers to “skill in means, or method.” It also has the connotation of “appropriateness”, of knowing exactly what is required in any specific instance. Students under the tutelage of one who is awake often find the teacher to be a bundle of contradictions, because what is said to one may be completely reversed in instructions to another. This is because the teacher understands the unique needs and capacities of each, honoring differences, and knowing what is best for each. (p. 20).

This ideology of being present, paying attention and understanding the unique needs of each learner was a dominant strand in the life writing process and guided our explorations. What did it mean to be present in the classroom? How did that reflect the teachers’ individual life philosophy and their understanding of teaching and learning? The importance of understanding who we are as teachers was highly significant. Therefore, the logical place to begin was with the study of the Self.

### *Mindfulness and Self*

An awakened teacher mindfully understands the Self. This understanding is critical in our current educational context, for “this may be a particularly appropriate historical moment from which to take the dynamic of journeying—leaving home, healing, coming home wiser, more sane and generally compassionate—and applying it to the generalized condition of our lives” (Smith, 1999, p. 2). We require a type of healing in our educational systems, and need to emphasize empathy and compassion as essential components to learning. There is an urgent need to synthesize the fractures of the factory model as “the need in the West for a new kind of spirituality is quite urgent...a kind of spirituality that is simpler, truer, and having its own integrity” (Smith, 1999, p. 3). This is a type of spirituality that is achieved by stopping all action

and paying attention, towards the creation of “a space where one is generally free to engage the world openly and without pre-judgment” (Smith, 1999, p. 4). This is a type of inner peace, a mindful awareness, which allows for a new type of engagement with the world. In contrast to religion, the word spirituality connects to our inner essence or being. It asks us to reflect on the deep question of “who are you and how does this impact the ways that you interact with the world. The first life writing exercise explored this ideology of an inner essence by asking the research participants to explore the question, “How do you personally define mindfulness based on your personal life story?” The participants explored deep memories, thoughts and experiences through this life writing exercise which presented powerful themes for analysis around the role of mindfulness and self as before we begin to understand others we need to understand who we are and how we walk in the world. This was the first step of our collective awakening. Once this process of self -reflection was completed, we were then positioned to understand our learners. This took us to the next step which was an exploration of the learning sciences.

### *Mindfulness and the learning sciences*

A scholarly inquiry into mindfulness in education would not be complete without raising the question of scientific evidence. From my own experience, intuitively I expected that measurable or observable physical evidence ought to exist to demonstrate the effects of mindfulness on the brain, emotions, behavior and learning performance, however, I was not confident at the start of my literature search in this area, that I would find credible scientific studies which would demonstrate this. The word “mindfulness” implies the existence of the mind, which is still a contested concept in the scientific community. As Bohac Clarke (2012, p. 145) noted,

The interaction of mind, brain, ‘person’, and spirituality with its subjective and undefinable nature is variously discussed, disputed, and dismissed in debates among neuroscientists, neuropsychologists, and philosophers (Damasio, 1999; Bennett, Dennett, Hacker & Searle, 2007; Dennett, 1998, 2003).

Since it is becoming clear that the brain is far more responsive to learning stimuli than was previously believed, an understanding of how it functions and learns is essential for those involved in curriculum and learning. Developments in cognitive neuroscience (Damasio, 2010; Doidge, 2007; Immordino Yang and Damasio, 2007; Ramachandran, 2011; Siegel, 2010; Sousa, 2010) show that

the plasticity of the brain allows the creation of new pathways, thereby resulting in new learning. The role of self -reflection and mindfulness has also been connected to neuroplasticity and increased ability to learn (Davidson et. al, 2012; Siegel, 2010).

As teachers' understanding of the flexibility of the brain increases, it follows that the pedagogical process should evolve in response to this new understanding of the cognitive labyrinth. Understanding the complexities of the brain, consciousness and mind is instrumental to the holistic development of the individual and of society. As Csikszentmihalyi (1993) reflects, "If we don't gain control over the contents of consciousness we can't live a fulfilling life, let alone contribute to a positive outcome of history. And the first step to achieving control is understanding how the mind works" (p. 29). For the second life writing prompt research participants explored the question, "How do you use mindfulness in the classroom context? What does it mean to your own professional praxis and your teaching?" By analyzing and braiding these stories I could determine the understanding of the learning sciences with regards to the research question. This synthesized the initial connection between self and the learning sciences. The next strand to be explored was the role stories play with regards to professional development and life- long learning.

#### *Mindfulness and stories*

Stories are not something that can be calculated and measured; rather, stories form the essence of our collective human condition as beings living within intersecting webs of life. However, often in education we seem somewhat determined to use scientific measurable data. We evaluate the stories of children, giving them marks for content and organization, which impedes the natural flow of creative expression. The fact that language evolved to allow us to communicate, to share ideas, thoughts and stories, has been lost, and we have become separated not only from our language but from ourselves and our environment. We break our stories into words, into letters, into grammatical structures, into fragmented pieces that lack interconnectivity and meaning, forgetting that the original sound of the vowel was the breath of life. The fragmented use of language does not honor and recognize the connection between our minds and our bodies, and the significance of that to our language. Language binds and connects our communities by allowing us to step into the shoes others and seek to truly understand different perspectives, participating in the mindful practice of staying present and paying attention.

Without this mindfulness, you cannot pay attention to stories unfolding because the mind remains “too encumbered with what you thought was important in that moment to take the time to stop, to listen and to notice things (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p.11). We need to slow down and pay attention to stories revealed through our language. It was through the actual life writing process itself that this section of the research was focused upon. Participants were asked to reflect upon the question, “Could storytelling be utilized to build a common vision in a learning community and to facilitate teacher professional development and learning?” The results from this data showed that storytelling can play a significant role in teacher professional development and life -long learning. It can serve as a metaphor for deeper understanding of the complex work of the system. Storytelling allowed the work of the system to be perceived through a different lens and to better identify the commonalities of the vision.

#### *Mindfulness and systems*

Each strand is part of a much larger system, yet often we remain unaware of this interconnection and instead mistake personal perception as the only valid viewpoint, given that our own personal understanding of our world shapes the way we see and view things. Thus, the differing perspectives that exist between individuals give rise to different meanings and modes of understanding. As Abram (1996) reflects, “It should be evident that the life-world may be quite different for different cultures. The world that a people experiences and comes to count on is deeply influenced by the way that we live and engage in the world” (p. 41). Our ontology shapes our epistemology, our very way of being and living in our world. This is also true of the way we understand our learning organizations, and our roles within these complex systems. To fully understand the diverse factors involved in these interconnected systems, we must think critically, and set aside the time and space for mindful contemplation. When we can think critically about the factors that affect the eventual outcome of these systems, we can allow new ideas to emerge and fresh ideas to be given breathing room.

For change to occur in an organization there needs to be a common vision, a philosophy which establishes a benchmark for helping us reach a mutual understanding despite the variance in our own personal lenses. Without a common vision, fragmentation and fracture may result in our organizational systems, as the ideas might appear out of alignment or as simply “add-ons” to what appears to be an already overburdened organization (Friesen &

Jardine, 2009). Time for reflection is critical for all stakeholders involved in a change paradigm, so that the participants can fully understand and consider the multiple perspectives and possibilities. For this life writing prompt participants were asked to reflect upon the question, “What role does systems direction and policy play in determining your day to day activities in the classroom context”. From this data, I could determine the impact of the system on the teacher’s ability to be mindful. At this point, there were 4 interconnected perspectives which informed the research question. The theoretical framework used provided a way to connect the pieces in a holistic and authentic way.

### *The Theoretical Framework – The Integral Model and Multiple Perspectives*

As there are Many interconnected complexities which impact the teaching praxis this journey required a framework that would allow for multiple perspectives. Wilber's Integral model (2000, 2006) was chosen as the theoretical framework. To examine and undertake research in such a diverse discipline as education requires a framework with the capacity for the consideration of the vast knowledge base and perspectives. The Integral model is a framework that provides a map for this study. “This map uses all the known systems and models of human growth—from the ancient shamans and sages to today’s breakthroughs in cognitive science” (Wilber, 2006, pg. 7). The four quadrants are described as four different perspectives on mindfulness based on two dimensions: individual versus collective and interior versus exterior. The *individual perspective* focuses on a singular person perspective in contrast to the *collective perspective*, which focuses on a social group. The *interior perspective* represents the first and second person point of view. Lastly, the *exterior perspective* focuses on a third person point of view that is considered objective. These four perspectives, taken together, present valuable insight into the interconnected whole. Wilber (2006) states, “in short, the Integral approach helps you see both yourself and the world around you in more comprehensive and effective ways” (p. 8). As teachers, working in an environment of complexity and change we are challenged to understand the interconnected factors which impact the work. We are faced with an inner exploration (UL), and an understanding of the learning sciences, specifically the development of the brain and human consciousness (UR). This is combined with need for deep knowledge and exploration of the collective stories that we share as humanity (LL), and a cognitive and interpretive understanding of the complex systems that impact

the other perspectives (LR). Although each quadrant of the Integral model can be studied as a separate area of focus the impact of the interconnected relationships of perspectives must be acknowledged and understood to truly encompass factors that impact our lives as educators functioning in highly complex and interconnected systems.

*Voices joining together for a mindful future – the findings of the life writing exercises*

The purpose of this research was to explore the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning. Of specific interest to the researcher was how the concept of mindfulness could be examined from though the life writing process using multiple perspectives via the Integral Model, combining philosophical ideologies with the learning sciences and the work of the education system. The research has combined scholarly work with the ideas and reflections of teachers working in the field to develop a working framework for a new approach to teacher professional development and pre-service teacher training. Establishing the foundation of this work involved braiding together different voices - teachers, academics, current system policies - with that of the researcher to come to a place of common understanding and meaning. This work is an attempt to weave together the disconnected pieces of our educational landscape to create something vibrant, living and whole. It is an effort to synthesize the art and science of educational research into a framework where each voice can be recognized and heard. Following is an overview of the data and found poems which summarize the key themes that emerged.

*Connection between mindfulness and personal and professional development (UL)*

The participants defined mindfulness clearly and recognized the need for mindfulness in their personal and professional life, but still struggled with implementing mindfulness techniques into their praxis. Hence, despite a clear understanding of the significant role mindfulness can play in education, teachers are still stressed about time, pushing on to some unknown destination. For most professionals, reflective time is still viewed as some type of luxury activity only to be enjoyed after the never-ending push of paper work is done.

Many of the participants are already intuitively implementing mindful strategies in their practice, but, for teachers unfamiliar with mindfulness, more institutional work in this direction must be made to reach teachers who can benefit from this training. Without

this type of training, teachers fall victim to burnout, which was evident in the research data. In some cases, teachers felt simply too overwhelmed to even consider making space for mindfulness. Yet, the data show that mental health and wellness is positively impacted by mindful praxis, which points to a need for this type of training in the personal and professional development of teaching. This type of self- and system-reflective approach should be a critical component of teacher education. The following found poem summarizes the main themes and images presented in this section of the research.

*Creating a space where students can just think  
Disconnected from the overstimulated world  
Seeking solace, seeking the pathway  
From a society lost in technology standardized tests and bureaucracy  
Teachers and students lost together trying to find the way*

*The interconnected complicated lives of teachers and students  
Merging together in this space and place that we call a classroom  
If we lose the connection a strand is broken somewhere in the web  
And a soul spins silently and slowly, forever lost in the Universe*

*Count the steps from the gym to the door, count your breaths  
Write, write, write and spew out the stories of your soul  
Take a breath and write a poem or let the poem write you  
As the process of mindfulness spins out around you as you become aware  
As you become present to the possibilities of what might be beholden  
Journal everyday if you can and understand who you are  
How you learn and what you can be as you take your space in the world  
Curriculum. Plan. Flight. Faith. Friend  
Kind. Change. Heart. Grow. Teach.*

*Connection between mindfulness and current brain research (UR)*

Most of the research participants recognized that there was a link between mindfulness and learning. Those working in high-risk settings used specific strategies to connect with students, while others based their work around methods they had learned in the University context. None of the participants had a formal understanding of the role of mindfulness in teaching and learning, specifically regarding the learning science. Current research in the neurosciences shows that mindfulness learning has significant implications for neuroplasticity and the development of higher lever thinking, specifically empathy and compassion.

This research is a starting point for future work in this area, as current teacher knowledge of the connection between mindfulness and learning science is limited from a formal

theoretical perspective. From an informal position, however, the teacher participants have involved themselves in mindfulness techniques without formal training, and have seen positive results. Personal accounts of these successes, such as life writing exercises, would allow a perfect starting space for future research, linking the current research. It is significant that the teacher participants came to an understanding of the benefits of mindfulness through their own experiences. However, a theoretical understanding of the learning sciences and the role of mindfulness needs to be firmly established to allow these parameters to develop to their fullest capacity.

The findings show the participants' understanding of the need to breathe and calm down. Additionally, the participants recognized the need to focus on the individual learner and implement the curriculum as a living, breathing work. They also envisioned being a "teacher of heart," which emphasizes the need for reflection for both the teacher and the student. Future research needs to demonstrate the connections between mindfulness and the learning sciences so that this work can be viewed with proper regard for its relevance.

The following found poem summarizes the main themes and images established regarding mindfulness and current brain research.

*Check out at the door of my classroom and just enjoy the space  
Connect with your writing, your heart, your story, our space  
One to one conversations with each other as we explore the possibilities  
Keeping our assumptions in check and trusting the process*

*Understanding that each classroom, each student, each brain  
Is unique  
And striving to find its space and place in the world amidst the obstacles  
Skills of thinking, of discovering, of knowledge to be beheld by the  
Seeker  
Reflect to fight off the feelings of drowning in a sea of nothingness*

*Accommodate and modify for what is needed – this will always be in flux  
Resiliency and self-efficacy are the final frontier  
Empathy and compassion for ourselves and each other  
Drip, drip, drip drop  
What is falling, what is dripping  
How are we becoming fully human?*

*Connection between mindfulness and current system direction  
(LR)*

The data gathered from the third life writing exercise reveals that there is still a tension between the teacher in the classroom and

the overarching system. The perspective of Alberta Learning, through the Inspiring Education policy, is reflective of the holistic approach to education. This ideology is also reflected in the vision of school board leaders who seek to discover individual gifts and talents of each unique learner. Alberta Education (2010) foreword cites Hancock, past Minister of Education stating education, “is about children realizing their potential and achieving their hopes, their dreams and aspirations. It is about each student belonging in a caring and inclusive network of educators who support them”.

The research participants recognized the challenges set out by Alberta Education’s vision, and struggled with them. Their stories speak of fighting for time and space with their students, as well as free space in curriculum and design where “student engagement in learning could be achieved by building relationships within and among multi-disciplinary teams to ensure holistic approach to student success” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 14). Meditative consciousness is the outcome of mindful teaching and is required for performing well within complex systems. If teachers can form a holistic understanding of systems and how complexities impact work of the classroom, their response to the system will determine the eventual outcome of change.

The following found poem summarizes the main themes and images regarding the impact of current systems directions and policy on day-to-day teaching activities.

*I have 100 forms to fill out and they are threatening to consume me  
There are no supplies, no budget and no support  
I feel like I cannot breathe and dream of my theoretical classroom  
And contemplate carefully how I will survive*

*Their bloodlust is insatiable  
With our hands in chains  
I can adjust my sails to their gale force winds  
I can breathe, and rise and prove that change is indeed possible*

*I can connect with others who share my vision  
Collaborate, cooperate, create  
Inspire, innovate and inhale  
The beautiful energy of change is evident in the air  
I am not alone, and my ideas do matter  
When I speak, people will listen*

*And although it might appear that the system is eroding slowly into empty nothingness  
It is simply changing from what it was, what it has always been*

*Into something new, something different, something that should not be feared*

*But passionately embraced as an evolution into a new space and place*

*Such as the butterfly who emerges from the dark web of the cocoon*

*Experiences the complete metamorphosis of change*

*And spreads its wings to the sky to take flight into a new reality*

*Overscheduled timetables, large classes, mounds of paper work*

*I defy you all and refuse to rush to the rapid ticking of the clock  
demanding my compliance*

*I will hope for the future and try to bring mindfulness into my  
consciousness*

*As I struggle with the push and pull of significant change that threatens to  
break me*

*The sheer volume is overwhelming and threatens to consume all the space*

*It will suffocate me if I face it alone but I do have a voice that I can  
choose to share*

*Every teacher, every student, every fibre in the web has a voice*

*We need to speak together and reflect mindfully*

*What will be the direction of our collective evolution?*

*How will our voices join together in story and celebration?*

*To unite the fraying strands of the interconnected web of life*

*And bring us into a collective harmony where the horizons meet*

*And the system breathes as One.*

#### *Connection between mindfulness and storytelling (LL)*

The findings indicate that storytelling can be used as a type of contemplative inquiry allowing teachers into a reflective, mindful space. It is a valuable research methodology, encouraging participants to address what is occurring in their lives and what factors are impacting their engagement with the world. It provides a more authentic voice than a survey or questionnaire, letting the research participants look at the stories of their own lives and how those stories have impacted them personally and professionally. The use of storytelling has deep historical roots, and needs to be reconsidered as a means of encouraging professional development and learning. It creates a dialogue concerning the quality of our lived experiences as teachers in our current educational context, which might be characterized as filled with anxiety, stress and traumas as well as joy, beauty and rebirth. The process of story sharing allows us to recognize all the components of the stories of our human life. Life writing can be used as a process of empathetic inquiry and emotional response is a critical part of learning for both teachers and students. The stories of our lives, and the emotional impact of those stories, play a critical role in how we learn and grow. As Siegel (2010) states, "the heart is indeed a wise

source of knowing" (p. 167). The reflective process of life writing can lead us to "the kind of knowing we wanted to honour: one that comes from the body, the heart and the imagination, from having our feet planted in the humus of day-today lived experience. (Chambers; Hasebe-Ludt; Leggo & Sinner, 2012, p. xxiv). It allows a portal to the deep realm of *teacher knowing*, as teachers go inward in search of self-understanding, which then allows for the Awakening required to understand the other, and our place in the interconnected communities of life.

The following found poem summarizes the main themes and images that emerged regarding mindfulness and storytelling.

*Rudyard Kipling offered fatherly advice  
But one needs to read carefully between the lines  
The perception of one's individual story  
Is not the only perception that one will find*

*Reflections on the journey can be a rough and bumpy ride  
But only if we dare to broach the path can we discover what is hidden  
deep inside  
Clearly I should return to my own story, dammit  
Stop preaching, stop teaching, start writing start sharing,*

*Stop the feelings of isolation that build within the confines of the  
classroom walls  
Open the doors to conversations and breed a new generation of teachers  
Who understand the power of their own stories, their own ways of  
knowing  
Who are then capable of teaching this reflective process to their unique  
and individual charges  
So we can all come to a mindful place we need to find in the here and the  
now*

*Reflect upon my story, with my colleagues, in a collaborative and open  
community  
And I can begin to see the changes although I did not even recognize that  
they were happening  
Simple language fails us and we cannot come to an understanding of one  
another  
Storytelling is an experience and not just a language that seeks to  
understand  
It speaks to those without a similar situation through the same process*

*Creating a shared experience and a portal for knowing, learning and  
being  
That is not accessible through a survey or textbook but only heard  
through a voice  
Shared experience and empathy build the bridge  
Towards a common understanding of curriculum and learning*

*Forged through the thrusting waters of the emotional purge of our stories  
As the patterns of the voices swirl, embrace and merge into patterns of life*

*How well do the Findings of this Study Address the Research Problem and its Related Assumptions?*

This study examined a specific research problem: what is the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning? Contained within this question are auxiliary assumptions, which were addressed in the research process and the analysis and interpretation of the data.

1. Authentic learning requires critical reflection.
2. Reflection and mindfulness are processes that require time.
3. Teachers acquire mindfulness over time if they are aware and motivated.
4. Mindfulness is required to come to higher understandings and deeper learning.
5. Storytelling is a way to make sense of how mindfulness is used in learning.
6. Current brain research supports the use of storytelling to increase the development of neural pathways in the brain.
7. Storytelling and language is a traditional way to transmit culture and wisdom from one generation to the next.
8. Storytelling can build community.
9. Storytelling can be used as a research methodology for a professional learning community.
10. Storytelling can be used as a research methodology to explore mindfulness, curriculum and learning

The intent of this research was to explore the role of mindfulness in our current educational context. Through the life writing process and ongoing engagement with the research participants, mindfulness has been shown to play a critical role. There is further work to be done in this area, specifically with regards to professional development and classroom application.

*Implications for professional development, work in the field and pre-service education programs*

<b><i>Upper left – Interior Individual – Subjective</i></b> <b><i>Mindfulness and Self (I)</i></b> <i>The Inner Exploration of being an Educator</i> <b><u>Key learning competency/understanding</u></b>	<b><i>Upper right – Exterior Individual – Objective</i></b> <b><i>Mindfulness and Science (Its)</i></b> <i>Learning sciences and contemplative neurosciences</i> <b><u>Key learning competency/understanding</u></b>
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<p>The ability to participate in the exploration, inquiry and reflection on what is the role of contemplative pedagogy and self-reflection in Education. This involves direct participant in the process that goes beyond an academic framework towards a lived experience of the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning.</p>	<p>Possessing an understanding of the new insights and applications of current discoveries and insights with regards to the learning sciences. Specific focus of this area is the concept of neuroplasticity and how this is connected to this idea of contemplative neuroscience.</p>
<p><b><i>Lower Left –Interior Collective-Intersubjective Mindfulness and Storytelling (We)</i></b>  <i>The explorations of the common understandings we all share through the life writing process.</i>  <u><b><i>Key learning competency/understanding</i></b></u>  The ability to use Life writing methodology as a tool to find patterns in our stories and systems that connect the most diverse insights and methodologies. By acquiring a “heart of wisdom” (Chambers, Hasbe-Ludt, Leggo &amp; Sinner, 2012) teachers will become agents of change in their own personal educational contexts.</p>	<p><b><i>Lower Right –Exterior Collective-Interobjective Mindfulness and Systems (Its)</i></b>  <i>Current system direction with regards to our current educational landscape</i>  <u><b><i>Key learning competency/understanding</i></b></u>  The ability to understand and reflect upon the interconnections of complex systems and the impact that they have. This knowledge will be used to promote a lifetime of growth and awakening in our educational systems as we fully understand the significance of the interconnected pieces of the whole.</p>

Based on the research findings, the following framework has been designed to support professional development, work in the field and pre-service education programs regarding the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning utilizing the work of Wilber (2008) and his theoretical framework for *Integral Life Practice*. Each quadrant is grounded with a key learning competency/understanding which was discovered via the life writing research process.

#### *Mindful Intergral Life Practice for Teachers (MILPT)*

#### *Recommendations for Professional Development in Education*

Life writing and the structural framework *MILPT* presents possibilities for deep, authentic and meaningful work in teacher

professional development. The development of mindful and reflective practitioners in teacher education and professional development programs has vast potential to be expanded into classroom curriculum design for k-12 learners with a careful focus on the learning sciences and neuroplasticity. Authentic and meaningful teaching praxis can and will impact holistic development of the learner from a social, emotional, cognitive and physical lens. Authentic work begins with our own story leading to the sharing of the stories of our collective journeys. As a researcher, I was honored to be joined on my journey to mindfulness by 9 others who sought a similar quest. Together, we have found new insights and inspiration which I am hopeful will bring us into a more mindful and reflective praxis allowing space for health, wellness and fulfillment in our personal and professional work. I end this paper with a final found poem, which is a synthesis of the 9 voices who joined me on this quest. It is my poetic attempt to merge the connection between our stories and create a unified whole. As Leggo (2010) reflects, “we need research that focuses on narrative, autobiographical, and poetic knowing” (p. xii.) Life writing, in all its various modes, has proven to be a powerful medium to build a common vision in a learning community and facilitate teacher professional development in learning.

*Step together into my carefully tended classroom garden  
My community of unique and individual colored flowers that all grow  
from the same Earth  
Waiting to burst into life and breathe together the essence of Being  
Deeply, slowly, peacefully yet full of vibrancy and light each blooming in  
a unique style*

*Understand the interconnected threads of the complex system  
That surrounds you, envelops you but does not contain you  
You are part of that System and you impact that System  
The sum of the parts will never be greater than the sum of the whole  
Your voice will be heard if you speak, allow the story to fall for  
You are part of the interconnected web of Life, your story must be told.*

*Seek not the shadows, the structure, and the stress as it is all an illusion  
Face the obstacles, recognize them and move beyond them  
Turn your face to the light and recognize the wisdom that lives deep  
within your body  
Your heart of wisdom and passion that opens the portals of perception  
The spirit that feeds on the process of poetry, peace, gratitude and grace*

*Inhale, exhale, be present and pay attention to what is needed now*

*Return to the people and our shared Earth to help Others find the way as the teacher*

*Soulfully seeking and sharing the stories of this collective, reflective, mindful journey*

*That we all undertake as part of this complicated, convoluted, possibly painful process*

*The journey that is the essence of human life and is required to find our way home.*

*Appendix A –Mapping the Research Questions onto the Integral Framework*

<p><b>Upper left – Interior Individual - Subjective</b>  <b>Mindfulness and Self (I)</b>  The inner explorations of being an Educator</p> <p>1a. What is the teachers' understanding of mindfulness?</p> <p>1b. How do teachers implement mindfulness in their own personal and professional practice?</p> <p>1c. How do teachers understand mindfulness in the classroom context?</p> <p>1d. Why do teachers use mindfulness in their teaching?</p>	<p><b>Upper right – Exterior Individual - Objective</b>  <b>Mindfulness and Science (It)</b>  Learning sciences and contemplative neurosciences</p> <p>2a. How do teachers interpret the curriculum mindfully and design their learning environments with sensitivity to individual needs?</p> <p>2b. Are lessons designed and assessed with regards to students' attainment of mindfulness</p> <p>2c. Do teachers understand the cognitive and physical impact of mindfulness in teaching and learning?</p>
<p><b>Lower Left – Interior Collective –Intersubjective</b>  <b>Mindfulness and Storytelling (We)</b>  The exploration of the common themes we shared through the life writing process</p> <p>3a. What is the impact of life writing with regards to building a common vision and</p>	<p><b>Lower Right – Exterior Collective - Interobjective</b>  <b>Mindfulness and Systems (Its)</b>  Current system and provincial direction with regards to the present context of our educational landscape.</p> <p>4a. What is the connection between mindfulness and Inspiring Education</p>

<p>identifying common themes?</p> <p>3b. Can storytelling via life writing be used as a tool for understanding the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning?</p> <p>3c. How can life writing be utilized in professional development?</p>	<p>4b. How does mindfulness align with the goal of personalization of student learning?</p> <p>4c. How does mindfulness align with the current vision of the B.Ed program at the University of Calgary?</p>
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*Appendix B- Mapping the Research Findings onto the Integral Framework*

<p><b>Upper left – Interior Individual - Subjective Mindfulness and Self (I)</b>  <i>The inner explorations of being an Educator</i></p> <p>1a. The research participants expressed a strong understanding of mindfulness and the need for reflection is evident.</p> <p>1b. Mindfulness is implemented into personal and professional practice in a variety of ways such as breathing, journaling, running and other physical activities and trying to simply find the time and space to be present and pay attention</p> <p>1c. Teachers understand mindfulness in the classroom context as being present and paying attention to the needs of each individual learner. They also understand it as slowing down and taking time to breathe.</p>	<p><b>Upper right – Exterior Individual - Objective Mindfulness and Science (It)</b>  <i>Learning sciences and contemplative neurosciences</i></p> <p>1. Teachers interpret the curriculum mindfully by trying to determine how it lives in the real world and how it is relevant in their individual classroom context. They question why they are doing things and how this will meet the broader learning outcome of preparing their students to function in the world. They allow for multiple access points in terms of instructional design, assessment and development. They approach curriculum not as an absolute but something to be used as a guideline depending on their particular context.</p> <p>2b. There is consideration of mindfulness with regards to lesson design. Many are using reflective</p>
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<p>1d. Teachers use mindfulness in their teaching as a coping strategy to deal with the increasing stress and anxiety that they perceive is present in their classrooms. They also use it as a way to understand curriculum and reflect upon how that curriculum lives in the real world. They use it both as a personal tool to support their own wellness and as a pedagogical tool to support the needs of the learners in their classrooms.</p>	<p>practices embedded within their assessment and allowing for open space with regards to implementation of the learning outcomes. There are conditions being created to allow the students a reflective space, so they can consider and contemplate their learning.</p> <p>2c. Teachers have a limited understanding of the cognitive and physical impact of mindfulness in teaching and learning. They are observing in their classrooms that something is indeed occurring with their students and with regards to their own well being when mindfulness is incorporated into the curriculum. However, they do not understand the cognitive and physical impact with regards to the learning sciences.</p>
<p><b><i>Lower Left – Interior Collective –Intersubjective Mindfulness and Storytelling (We)</i></b>  <i>The exploration of the common themes we shared through the life writing process</i></p> <p>3a. Life writing can be used as a tool to identify common themes. The identification of these common themes then provides a benchmark for building a common vision. This research did not obtain the goal of reaching a future vision but did establish that it is possible using this format.</p> <p>3b. Storytelling was used effectively as a tool for understanding the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning. It provided a reflective methodology that was suitable to the context of the</p>	<p><b><i>Lower Right – Exterior Collective - Interobjective Mindfulness and Systems (Its)</i></b>  <i>Current system and provincial direction with regards to the present context of our educational landscape.</i></p> <p>4a. There is a direct connection between mindfulness and Inspiring Education with regards to key philosophies. Both focus on the needs of the individual learning and the relevancy of curriculum with regards to creating engaged, ethical and entrepreneurial citizens who know who they are.</p> <p>4b. Mindfulness has a direct correlation with the personalization of student learning as a mindful teacher knows what each particular student needs in any given context. Due to their ability to be present and pay attention they apply curriculum based on the individual learning needs of the student and area able to accommodate and</p>

<p>research question.</p> <p>3c. Life writing can be utilized in professional development to empower teachers to recognize and learn from their own voices. It is a reflective process that asks teachers to go inward, to examine their own stories to first understand themselves and their perceptions. It provides the foundation for story sharing which will allow teachers to work collaboratively together in a reflective fashion exploring the interconnected stories of our educational landscapes.</p>	<p>adjust as needed.</p> <p>4c. Although there are some courses which focus on mindfulness and reflection indirectly there is not a direct alignment here. This work could be accomplished through the Pragmatics course, specialization areas; adult and lifelong learning as well as the learning sciences but currently is not a direct focus in the current B.Ed program at the University of Calgary. The exposure to the role of mindfulness in curriculum and learning is dependent upon the individual instructors facilitating the course.</p>
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